



Esther

"And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight . . . so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen." Esther 2:17

Esther's family had been deported from Jerusalem to Babylon in the sixth century B.C. Her parents died when she was very young and she was brought up by her uncle, Mordecai. Though deprived of their normal ways of worship, the Jewish exiles still clung to their traditions and their religion.

When Ahasuerus, king of the Persians, repudiated Vashti, he resolved to find another queen. Word went out through his dominions to summon all the beautiful virgins and send them to the king. Among those who were sent was the Jewish maiden Esther. She was preferred by Ahasuerus to all the other beauties of his land, and he made her his queen.

Haman, the king's prime minister, planned to massacre every Jew in the empire. Hearing of this, Mordecai, Esther's kinsman, clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes and mourned before the palace gate. A servant brought to Esther a message from Mordecai informing her of Haman's cruel design, and insisting that she intercede with Ahasuerus to spare her people.

The law forbade anyone to approach the king without being summoned. If anyone did so that person was subject to the death sentence, unless the king held out his golden sceptre. Though compliance with Mordecai's request involved risking her life, Esther decided to seek a meeting with the king: "And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

The king received Esther kindly, promising to grant her whatever she desired. Thereupon she told Ahasuerus of the plans to destroy her people. "Who is he," asked the king, "and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Esther replied, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Forthwith Ahasuerus gave orders for Haman to be hanged on the gibbet that had been prepared for Mordecai.

Thus did Esther, the queen, with great selflessness and courage, risk her own life in her people's behalf.

